

THE HORSESHOE OF LUCK.

BY RUDOLPH F. BUNNER.



"UNLESS I find some berries," he said, "we shall have only the empty blue bowl for supper." And again he brushed aside the bramble-bushes and docks and mullens that grew above his head, and looked along the hedgerow and up the dim little road.

Up the little road to where it grew misty and lonesome looked little Jan; and there he saw a horseman, small, and afar off, coming toward him. The horse, fat, short, and white, plashed the damp earth as he came nearer and nearer; and afar off Jan saw the rider's smile like the smile of a grinning imp, good-natured, strange, and goblin-like as his body, legs, and ears. His eyes twinkled like little, distant stars in the coming twilight as he noticed that Jan was watching his approach.

"Berries?" cried the little figure on horseback. "Pick the berries by your head."

And Jan looked at the berries he was standing near.

His hand reached for the fruit, but his eyes settled on the stranger; and as they took in his queer style of dress, his fat little stomach, his broad, grinning features, they grew round and wide, till his mouth followed suit and breathed forth a wondering "O!" of surprise.

"You never saw any one like me, did you?" asked the rider. "You ought to take a good look at me, so I'll go home with you, and spend the night at your house." His words bubbled out as water flows from a round bottle. "Come, you hungry little boy with the yellow cap!—but first pick up those eggs near your feet."

Jan stared, and slowly turned his eyes from

his new friend to the ground; then he picked up the eggs, and fixed his eyes on him again.

"And here in my wallet," cried the horseman, "is enough for the rest of the supper. Well, well, we are in—in—good fortune!"

"You are Luck!" screamed Jan, rushing forward. "You are Luck! And my father has waited so long for you!" His berries and



"HIS HAND REACHED FOR THE FRUIT, BUT HIS EYES SETTLED ON THE STRANGER."

eggs fell from his hands as he rushed at the stranger; but his friend, with a merry twist of his foot, caught them before they touched the

ground and held them, while Jan clasped and clung to his leg, and Jan's features grew light with a glow of joy.

The horse, who looked steadily down the road with his comfortable eyes, moved forward a little; his hoofs slowly paced over the ground,—each hoof, brown and wide, spread out like the shell of a horseshoe crab,—and he carried Jan with him, anchored to Luck's foot like a happy barnacle. When the little boy detached himself, and frisked in front and looked the horse full in the face, jumping backward as he did so, he saw how wise he must be—or *was* he so wise? Was he only quiet and stupid? There seemed one expression behind another, like the changing leaves of a silver poplar,—and which was the real one? Jan did not know; he did not care; he patted the horse's front face, his fingers stroked the fuzzy hair over the long, hard bone between his eyes, and then he harked back to Luck, and thumped his fat wallet.

"There 's supper in that for us all," smiled Luck. "We should have all we want to-night, even if we had no berries, eh?"

"Yes! And what is your horse's name?" cried Jan.

"Well, 'Contentment.' Contentment ought to go with Luck, ought n't it?"

"Yes, yes!" said Jan. "See, how fast we have come; that little house is father's, where the door swings crooked."

"But the gate is half off its hinges, so that evens things up," answered Luck. "We'll jump it, my horse. You need n't open it for me. It needs careful use—your gate, your house, your chimney. I hope your chimney will last while we cook our supper."

"Of course it will if you 're with us," answered Jan, readily, as they turned from the road to the path to the house.

But before they reached the door a man, tall and gaunt, with dreary eyes that still had a look of patient hope in them, came out on the step. His arms went up in the air and his face broke into a smile of relief, for he had waited long for Luck, and now he knew him. Then he gave a backward call over his shoulder to his wife, and stepped forward as the white form of Contentment vaulted over the gate. The

hind hoof struck the tottering post as it did so, but the post did not fall, though a sharp clinking sound cut the damp twilight air and a shiny, ringing horseshoe, loosened from the beast's



"'I CAN KREP IT, CAN I NOT—A HORSESHOE FROM YOUR OWN WHITE HORSE'S FOOT?' HE CRIED ANXIOUSLY."

foot, trundled and bounced to where the man stood, and circled down on the moss-green gravel at his feet. And as it fell at his feet he dropped on his knees and grasped it. "I can keep it, can I not—a horseshoe from your own white horse's foot?" he cried anxiously, looking, as he spoke, up into the twisting, merry face of Luck.

"Of course, of course! I have plenty," nodded his guest, grinning at him between the horse's sleepy ears. "Well, will your little boy take him to the shed?"

"I will—I will myself," said the man, rising and hanging his new treasure over his arm where it shone like a silver bracelet; he waved his hand toward the doorway where his wife



"HE WAS KNEELING BEFORE THE FIRE."

and little girl appeared. "My wife will show Luck shot over the horse's head, landing, feet you in, and I will be back at once—at once." first, alert, and with the eggs unbroken, before



"AND THEN THEY SAT DOWN TO SUPPER."

the wife and the little girl, who stood in the doorway. They both bowed, courtesied, moved aside, and smiled shyly and hopefully, gazed deprecatingly at the novel guest, pushed wider open the door for him, and Luck entered the house.

Hand in hand the mother and the little girl Gertrude came after him, softly and quietly. He was kneeling before the fire, and at his breath the green wood that, as it smoked and smoldered had given forth little plaintive whistles and sounds as though it was crying to be taken back to the forest, stopped all this and changed the tune to a dance of red and yellow flames, and they shone over Luck's mischievous features, over the mother's pale face, over Gertrude's open, black eyes, over Jan's round cheeks, and sparkled on the mist of tears of gratitude and raindrops on the gaunt features of the man. He had come back, for he had left Contentment moored in the one sheltered corner of the old and rickety stable where the rainy mist now thick in the air could not reach and chill him.

They watched Luck—Luck who acted as cook—who emptied his rusty fat wallet for supper, who fanned the smoke up the chimney, and who even found time for the candle, and trimmed and snuffed the candle wick until the flame grew bright.

And then they sat down to supper, huddled at one end of the table, that the long delayed visitor might not be crowded and that he might be pleased by the courtesy shown him.

"Some eggs?" cried the head of the house, pushing the dish quietly forward—

"Or, would you rather have some berries to finish your supper with?" murmured the wife, as she caught Luck's roving eye.

It went merrily on, the supper, and Luck's hobgoblin smile flashed over his face, came, and flitted away.

"What did you do with the horseshoe?" whispered the man's wife to him.

"It's over the door, right enough," he replied. "I could find no nails, but tomorrow will do; there was a hook that I hung it on for the time.

But we have better than that with us"; and his lean features smiled in a rusty way at his guest, as though they were not used to such antics.

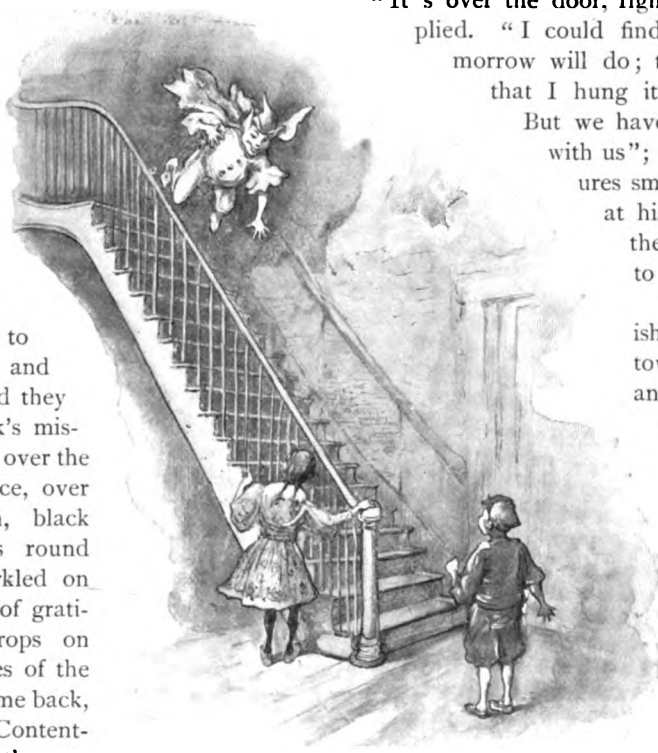
When they finished, Luck turned toward the children, and for the rest of the drizzly, damp evening, indoors, cozy and comfortable, Luck amused them. He showed them how to tumble downstairs without getting hurt—

with no bumps when it was done,—how to drop the glass and china, the little they had, so it would not break. He laughed and frolicked with them, and chased over the little house like a lively kitten.

"Where shall we put him?" asked the man, when their visitor for the moment had frisked upstairs.

"In our room, of course; we must sleep in the one opposite," answered his wife.

"But you forget that the roof leaks in that one," he replied uneasily, as a gust of wind came, and a thud sounded from upstairs.



"HE SHOWED THEM HOW TO TUMBLE DOWNSTAIRS WITHOUT GETTING HURT."

"Was that Luck?" cried the woman anxiously.

"Oh, mother!—the big old birds' nest has blown down on the roof," came the voice of Jan from above.

Sure enough it had, and there it had lodged, over the leak, so as to keep dry the room they were to sleep in.

It was late when they went to bed, for Luck, with the children, now bethought him to find things in the house long hidden or mislaid. Where there 's little to lose there 's less to find; yet a penny and a bent sixpence came to light, and other things followed, little in all, it must be confessed, but enough to keep the whole family awake and excited until a late hour.

the little old clock kept up their race as the hours went by, the one hand always winning because it has the longest leg and the other sleeps too much. The leaves outside grew heavy with moisture, and the sly and creeping mist covered the house, the weedy garden, the fields—

Splash!

A drop had fallen full on the nose of the sleeping man, waking him from his dreams of good times.

Splash!

Another came from the leak above his head that the dislodged birds' nest had stopped up.

He bounded out of bed and faced the darkness of early morning. Groping and chilled,



"THEY ALL STARTED OUT, GOING WHERE THE HORSE'S FOOTPRINTS LED THEM."

Then, when he was ready, Luck was shown to his room. He closed the door, and with a merry bound they heard him land in the middle of the bed; and then they themselves went to their rooms, happy and sleepy, to be ready for the morning.

Over the house quiet settled, and the outside noises that the merriment had drowned before could make themselves heard: the swish of the boughs when the breeze blew and they rubbed themselves against the house and wrote their names in the language of the trees on the weather-stained and faded clapboards; the drip, drop, drip of the rain from the worn and sloping eaves. Downstairs the hands of

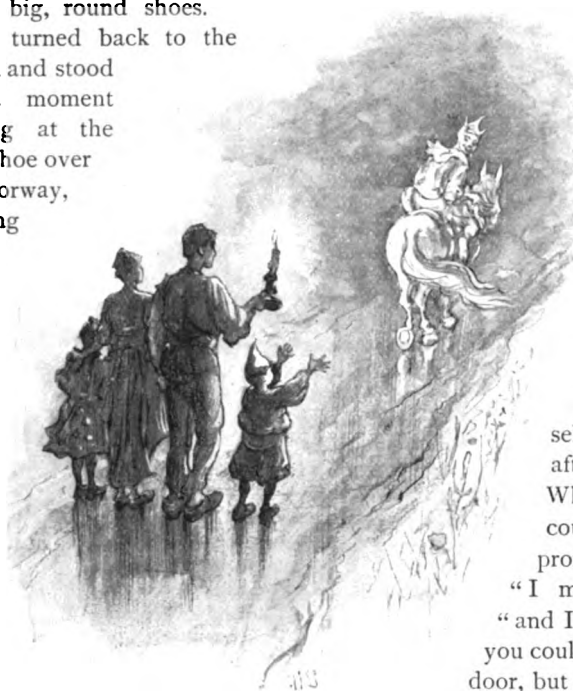
he lit a candle. The rain had stopped, though the cold mist still hung round the house, and the soaked birds' nest had ceased to keep the ceiling dry.

"I wonder if these things happen when Luck is dozing?" he asked himself, and, sleepy and annoyed, he started off to wake his visitor. The door of Luck's lodging-place was open, but when he reached there, and the flame of the candle straightened itself out and lit the room, he saw an empty bed!

Now he was well awake himself. He called out to the rest of the family, he ran downstairs, he looked in the shed, where no fat white horse was to be found, but only a few foot-

prints, fast fading in the wet earth,
of the big, round shoes.

He turned back to the
house, and stood
for a moment
looking at the
horseshoe over
the doorway,
hanging



"'I LEFT YOU,' SAID LUCK, 'BECAUSE OF YOUR OWN MISTAKE.
YOU TRUSTED TO ME—YOU TRUSTED TO LUCK!'"

with the points down, and wondered if the
luck as well as the rain was running out of
them. He ran inside and called to the rest
of the family to follow; and, half-dressed, they
all started out, going where the horse's foot-
prints led them.

It makes one all the more angry not to know
just whom to be angry with; but as he ran and
stumbled and shaded the candle flame with his
hand, he felt that he had been badly—yes,
very badly—treated. The road seemed long,
the day struggled but slowly into its place, and
the light was dim and faint.

His anger kept him warm for a while, but
the rest of the family, not being keyed up to the
same pitch, without speaking chattered from the
cold and chill, and squirmed and shrugged up
their shoulders as they chased along through
the puddles and mud, and splashed and stum-
bled on, led by the blowzed, flickering light
from the flame that still hung on to the wick
of the tallow dip—smoking, wavering, yellow.

"I hear his horse's hoofs
splashing!" cried their leader.

"We shall soon catch him!"

"Ah! ah!" he cried again,
as through the lightening mist
he saw the white tail of the
horse. "Here he is—here!"
and rushing alongside of Luck
he grasped at the saddle with
one hand, half running and
walking meanwhile; for Luck
looked straight ahead, and made
no effort to stop till his horse came
to a standstill of itself.

"Oh! are n't you ashamed of your-
self," cried the man, "to treat me so,
after my waiting for you all these years!
What have I not put up with on your ac-
count? And now—now to break your
promise and play me a trick like this—"

"I make no promises," answered Luck,
"and I break none. I left you, not because
you could not even nail my horseshoe over your
door, but hung it upside down so the luck ran
out at the ends; but because of your own mis-
take. Do you not know what it was? You
trusted to me. *You trusted to Luck!* Ah, ha!—"

As the wife, Jan, and Gertrude came up, the
shoulders of Luck looked square and unfriendly
while he faded in the mist. But he gave one
backward glance when almost out of sight,
and his hobgoblin smile was seen once more.

They all went home, and the gaunt man
took the lesson home with him. And when
Luck comes again, as he will, he will make
a longer visit, for he will find the chimney
plastered, the gate upon its hinges, the door
swinging straight and even, and with the horse-
shoe nailed—the only way a horseshoe should
be nailed, and that is as you see it here:

